

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
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R 081300Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0514
INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN EWUE
AMEMBASSY ACCRA
AMEMBASSY DAKAR XUPQ
AMEMBASSY LAGOS
AMEMBASSY LOME
AMEMBASSY NIAMEY
AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOQ
AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 0346

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDIP, FR, DM
SUBJ: BENINESE HARRASSMENT OF FRENCH DIPLOMATS

REF: A. COTONOU 0015, B. COTONOU 0033, C. COTONOU 0124

1. FRENCH CHARGE POUSSIN TOLD US MARCH 7 THAT GOVERNMENT OF PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BENIN (GPRG) IS CONTINUING TO SINGLE OUT FRENCH DIPLOMATS AND FRENCH EMBASSY FOR SPECIAL HARRASSMENT. ALTHOUGH MEMBERS OF OTHER DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS RESIDENT IN COTONOU HAVE BEEN ABLE TO LEAVE AND RE-ENTER BENIN WITHOUT ANY SPECIAL FORMALITIES, WHERE FRENCH DIPLOMATS ARE CONCERNED, GPRB IS ONCE AGAIN APPLYING MARCH 1977 TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS. IN ADDITION TO REQUIRING FRENCH DIPLOMATS TO OBTAIN EXIT VISAS FROM IMMIGRATION AUTHORITIES IN COTONOU --A REQUIREMENT FROM WHICH DIPLOMATS BY VIRTUE OF THEIR STATUS ARE EXEMPT -- GPRB NOW REFUSES TO PERMIT FRENCH DIPLOMATS TO PASS THROUGH BORDER CROSSING
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POINTS WITHOUT WRITTEN AUTHORIZATION FROM THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

2. WHILE LOCAL TRADESMEN AND REPAIRMEN MAY NOW VISIT MOST EMBASSIES WITHOUT DIFFICULTY, SOLDIERS POSTED OUTSIDE OF FRENCH

EMBASSY COMPOUND HAVE BEEN TAKING NAMES OF BENINESE WHO SEEK TO ENTER FRENCH EMBASSY. TWO FRENCH EMBASSY LOCAL EMPLOYEES ARE PRESENTLY UNDER ARREST ON UNSPECIFIED CHARGES. FRENCH CHARGE BELIEVES THAT THEY WERE DENOUNCED AS "COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARIES" BY A GPRB PLANT WITHIN FRENCH EMBASSY.

3. COMMENT: GPRB ACTIONS APPEAR TO BE DIRECTLY RELATED TO FRENCH GOVERNMENT DECISION NOT TO CONSIDER NEW ASSISTANCE PROJECTS UNTIL BENINESE GIVE POSITIVE SIGN OF A DESIRE TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH FRENCH. RECALL OF FRENCH COOPERATION DIRECTOR FOLLOWING BENINESE DEMAND FOR WITHDRAWAL OF FRENCH AMBASSADOR IN EARLY JANUARY HAS BEEN INTERPRETED BY GPRB AS A HOSTILE AND UNEXPECTED ACTION. IN PAST, EVEN WHEN POLITIGAL TENSIONS EXISTED BETWEEN FRENCH FOREIGN MINISTRY AND GPRB, FRENCH MINISTRY OF COOPERATION COULD BE COUNTED ON TO PROVIDE NECESSARY (ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE. WE UNDERSTAND FROM FRENCH CHARGE THAT FRENCH FOREIGN AND COOPERATION MINISTRIES ARE CURRENTLY WRANGLING OVER ISSUE WITH FORMIN GAINING ADVANTAGE.

4. BOTH FRENCH AND BENINESE ARE WAITING FOR OUTCOME OF FRENCH ELECTIONS. BENIN SEEMS TO FEEL THAT LEFT'S VICTORY IS ASSURED AND THAT SUCH A GOVERNMENT WOULD INCREASE ASSISTANCE LEVELS AND SEND AN AMBASSADOR WILLING TO WORK MORE CLOSELY WITH GPRB. IF FRENCH LEFT DOES NOT COME TO POWER, GPRB MAY FIND ITSELF IN UNCOMFORTABLE POSITION VIS-A-VIS ITS PRINCIPAL SOURCE OF

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